**NISRARSU031 Researcher Access to Secure Environment**

The purpose of this document is to record the process that has been developed to control researcher access to the RSU secure environment. This process have been streamlined to cover both NILS and ADRC and will reduce the burden on researchers in applying for NILS and ADRC projects. It has also been strengthened to ensure a review of researcher access to the secure environment after a period of time. This process will be mandatory from 1st September 2016.

The process for a researcher being granted access to the RSU secure environment has three elements:

1. From 1st July 2014 it is a mandatory requirement for all researchers to attain **NISRA** **Approved Researcher status**.
2. All researchers named on a project must have completed the [**Safe User of Research data Environments (SURE)**](http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/NILSResearchSupportUnit/News/UpcomingSafeResearcherDates/#d.en.443584) training course.
3. Researchers who wish to access data within the RSU secure environment are also required to have **Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) clearance.**
4. **NISRA Approved Researcher Status**

All researchers who wish to access de-identified micro-data within the secure environment, via ADRC or NILS, must undergo the NISRA Approved Researcher process prior to the commencement of an approved research project.

The researcher must submit an application using the NISRARSU020 Application for Accreditation as an Approved Researcher Form or the RSUCensus008 Census Secure Microdata Approved Researcher Form.

The Application for Accreditation as an Approved Researcher form asks for details of experience and professionalism and is assessed by a panel of NISRA staff to approve the researcher as a ‘fit and proper’ person. This panel consists of a Senior Principal Statistician, a Principal Statistician and two Deputy Principal’s from RSU. Each application should be assessed by at least two panel members.

To meet the criteria needed to be accredited as an Approved Researcher the researcher must be affiliated with a recognised UK institution. If the institution is not academic or a public sector organisation, it must be listed in the [UK list of eligible independent research organisations](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/). The affiliation must be for research (and non-commercial) purposes. Affiliated is defined as affiliated to a UK institution which will act as institutional guarantor. Therefore the researcher has to demonstrate the support of an institutional guarantor. Researchers from non-UK universities can be approved but can only work on NILS projects.

Approved Researcher Status is granted for three years. Thereafter, this will continue to be valid, on receipt of a signed copy of NISRARSU033 Researcher Security Renewal Declaration from the researcher. This form asks the researcher if there have been any change in circumstances that may affect their Approved Researcher Status (i.e. Institutional Guarantor still guaranteed and no breaches have taken place). If the researcher no longer meets the eligibility criteria (e.g. if they change employment their original institutional guarantor will no longer be relevant), if the institutional guarantee for a researcher is withdrawn by their guarantor or if any supervision deemed necessary for the researcher to be considered ‘fit and proper’ is withdrawn (including those cases where a PhD student is required to demonstrate the support of their supervisor) then Approved Researcher Status will again be reviewed by the panel and a decision will be made on whether the researcher needs to reapply for Approved Researcher Status. If, at the three year review point, the researcher continues to meet the eligibility criteria Approved Researcher Status will continue to be valid for a further period of three years.

Researchers who can only display limited experience, such as Undergraduate/Master’s/PhD students, who have been asked to contribute to a research project led by an Approved Researcher, may be granted Provisional Approved Researcher status which is valid for one year. The researcher may only work on projects with the supervising Approved Researcher. Both the researcher and the supervising Approved Researcher must be contracted to the same organisation/institute. Provided there has not been a breach or major inactivity during this time, the researcher will be upgraded to full Approved Researcher Status once the year is completed.

Each researcher named on a project must have either full or provisional Approved Researcher Status, with at least one person on a project holding full Approved Researcher Status.

1. **Safe User of Research data Environments (SURE) Training**

All researchers named on a project, who wish to access data within the secure environment, must complete [Safe User of Research data Environments (SURE) training](http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/NILSResearchSupportUnit/News/UpcomingSafeResearcherDates/#d.en.443584).  This training is provided by ONS, the UK Data Service, the Administrative Data Network (ADRN) and HMRC.  The training in Northern Ireland is provided by both ADRN and NILS staff.

SURE training includes information on the legislation relating to administrative data, data security and researchers’ responsibilities and the penalties for data breaches. It also outlines the constraints of working effectively in the RSU secure environment, including the legal context, possible sanctions and statistical disclosure control methods. The obligations of both the RSU and the researcher are explained.

SURE training must be renewed every two years. The researcher is required to retake the training and pass the test. If a researcher has not passed the test, or signed up to attend a further training session, once the two years have passed, they will not be granted any further access to the secure environment until the training is successfully completed.

RSU staff email ADRC-NI Project Administrator with a list of all researchers who require SURE training. A record of all training is held on SharePoint.

Completion of SURE training will also allow access to other safe settings across the UK, such as ONS.

For NILS projects, researchers who wish to gain access to project outputs in an advisory capacity, but who do not need access to data in the secure environment can be treated as an Associate Researcher. In order to become an Associate Researcher a researcher must complete NILS Safe Researcher Training (SRT) (if they have not already completed SURE training). This is provided by RSU staff when there is sufficient need for the training to take place. NILS SRT can be delivered online via WebEx to those researchers who are unable to attend the face-to-face SRT training sessions in NISRA Headquarters. SRT training must be renewed every two years.

Note: Once a SURE associate training module has been developed by ADRN this will take the place of the NILS SRT for Associate Researchers. This will be less intensive than the full day SURE training and will be an online training session dealing with the responsibilities of Associate Researchers.

For ADRC projects, researchers who wish to gain access to project outputs in an advisory capacity but who do not need access to data in the secure environment, need to complete the full SURE training.

1. **Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) Clearance**

Researchers with both Approved Researcher Status and Safe User Of Research data Environments (SURE) training or Safe Researcher Training are considered to be ‘accredited’. An accredited researcher who wishes to access data within the secure environment is also required to have Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) clearance.

To be granted BPSS, researchers resident in Northern Ireland, must supply RSU with a valid AccessNI Disclosure Certificate. It is the responsibility of the researcher to apply for an [Access NI basic disclosure check](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-online-basic-check). The researcher must submit an online application, send copies of relevant Identity Documentation and arrange payment to AccessNI directly.

Government researchers will not require BPSS clearance as they will have been cleared as part of the recruitment process.

Researchers resident in GB must also undergo a basic disclosure check. They can apply to the Disclosure and Barring Service, Access-NI or Disclosure Scotland for this.

For non-UK residents it is not always possible to complete the criminal record check. Therefore they will be required to sign the NISRARSU010 Criminal Record Statement (detailing any unspent convictions in the absence of an authentic security check.

In the case of civil servants, when they are granted BPSS, this does not run out and they would be expected to inform RSU of any changes in circumstances.

In the case of researchers, BPSS Status is valid for three years. Thereafter, this will continue to be valid, on receipt of a signed copy of NISRARSU033 Researcher Security Renewal Declaration from the researcher. This form asks the researcher to state if there have been any change in circumstances that might affect their security clearance. If the researcher no longer meets the eligibility criteria then BPSS Status will again be reviewed by a panel of NISRA staff and a decision will be taken on whether the researcher needs to reapply for full BPSS status. This panel consists of a Senior Principal Statistician, a Principal Statistician and two Deputy Principal’s from RSU. Each application should be assessed by at least two panel members. If, after the three year review point, the researcher continues to meet the eligibility criteria BPSS Status will continue to be valid for a further period of three years.

Note: As of July 2016, ONS do not require researchers who wish to access data within the secure environment to complete a security standard clearance.

1. **Statement for Academic Journals requesting access to NILS data**

Any access to NILS data provided to academic journals for the purposes of validating results from NILS projects will be subject to the same conditions as access to NILS data for research purposes:

* Access to NILS data is subject to successful completion of the ONS Approved Researcher process and baseline personal security standard check.
* Access to the NILS data will be approved by the Research Approvals Group (RAG) and will be treated as any other NILS or NIMS project.
* NILS data can only be accessed in the NISRA secure environment.
* All outputs will be checked for disclosure risk before release and must satisfy NILS-RSU’s Statistical Disclosure Control rules.

1. **Comparison of ONS, ADRN and NISRA Approved Researcher Policies**

***Greyed out segments are where policies are the same or comparable***

| **Principle** | **ONS Approved Researcher policy 2016** | **ADRN proposed policy** | **NISRA** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Researcher accreditation and project approval are split | Researcher accreditation and project approval are split | Same | Same |
| Researcher accreditation | Undergraduate degree with significant maths or statistics content or 3 years quantitative research experience | Relevant expertise and capable of carrying out research independently or under direction of supervisor. | Relevant experience and professionalism to be assessed by a panel |
|  | Successfully completed SURE training | Same | Same |
|  | Agree to inclusion in a list of all accredited researchers on ONS website | Not requested in ADRN policies | Not required by NISRA but a list is published on the NILS website |
|  | Agree to publish results of all projects | Same- in format of 2 page lay summary | Do not require agreement to publish results of projects |
|  | Sign and adhere to Accredited Researcher Declaration | Same- agree to terms of use | Sign and adhere to Researcher Declaration |
|  | If from outside UK- need to have UK based sponsor | Must be affiliated to UK institution | Must be affiliated to recognised UK institution |
|  |  |  | Institutional guarantor must sign and adhere to Institutional Guarantor Declaration |
| How long accreditation lasts for | 5 years – then new researcher application needed, or can lose in meantime for breach, no longer meets criteria, SURE training being out of date. | No time limit but can lose status for breach, no longer meets criteria, SURE training being out of date. | 3 years – renewed on receipt of a signed copy of NISRARSU033 Researcher Security Renewal Declaration from the researcher |
| Other forms of accreditation | Provisional accreditation:  For individuals who meet other criteria but not academic or experience criteria but asked to contribute to research project led by accredited researcher. | Associate Researcher:  Access to project outputs in an advisory capacity, but does not need access to data in the secure centre. | Provisional accreditation: Researchers who can only display limited experience, such as Undergraduate/Master’s/PhD students, who have been asked to contribute to a research project led by an Approved Researcher |
| Criteria for provisional accreditation | Successfully completed SURE | n/a | Successfully completed NILS Safe Researcher Training |
|  | Agree to inclusion in a list of all accredited researchers on ONS website |  | Not required by NISRA but a list is published on the NILS website |
|  | Agree to publish results of all projects |  | Do not require agreement to publish results of projects |
|  | Sign and adhere to Accredited Researcher Declaration |  | Same |
|  | Accredited Researcher to direct and supervise all work |  | Same |
|  | Accredited and provisional researcher must be contracted to the same organisation/ institution |  | Accredited and provisional researcher must be contracted to the same organisation/institute. This is covered by institutional guarantor |
|  | Application must explain how individual will contribute to research projects |  | Not required |
|  | Lasts for one year |  | Valid for one year. Provided there has not been a breach or major inactivity during this time, the researcher will be upgraded to full Approved Researcher Status once the year is completed. |
| Criteria for provisional or associate accreditation | n/a | Meet criteria for researcher (except requirement for full SURE training) | Meet criteria for researcher (except requirement for full SURE training) |
|  |  | Successfully completed SURE associate training | Successfully completed NISRA Safe Researcher Training |
|  |  | Agree to terms of use | N/A |
|  |  | No access to secure centre | No access to secure centre |
|  |  | No time limit but can lose status for breach, no longer meets criteria, SURE training being out of date. | Valid for one year but can lose status for breach, no longer meets criteria, SRT training being out of date. |
| Application process | Complete form and return by email to ONS | Complete form and email to ADRN | Complete form and return by email or post to NILS RSU |
| Approved projects process | Application to ONS microdata release panel | Application to ADRN approval panel and also dependent on data owner approval processes | Application to the NILS Research Approvals Group |
|  | Includes summary of research proposal | summary of research proposal | Includes summary of research proposal |
|  | Explanation of how project serves public good | Summary of ‘public benefit’ | Explanation of how research may support the development/delivery of public policy |
|  | Data required for analysis | Same | Same |
|  | Names of all researchers | Same | Same |
|  | Details how project findings will be published | Must provide 2 page lay summary under terms of use and explain how findings will be disseminated | Detail plans for dissemination of research findings/outputs |
| Approved research projects criteria | Primary purpose is to serve public good in UK | * The project is for non-commercial research purposes * The project has evident potential public benefit * There is a demonstrable value from using unit level administrative data to answer the research question. * The project would not be more appropriately served by other existing services (e.g. UKDS Secure Lab, Longitudinal Studies, HMRC Data Lab, etc. * The project does not constitute normal operational functions undertaken by government departments or their agencies. | All proposals must meet the following [criteria](http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/NILSResearchSupportUnit/FileStore/Filetoupload,508344,en.DOCX):  (1) have a longitudinal aspect;  (2) illustrate how using NILS/NIMS data will uniquely contribute to the study;  (3) provide clear evidence of the value of the proposed study to Health and Social Care-related research and specific policies; and  (4) support the development/delivery of public policy. |
| Time limit for research proposal | Set by ONS based on complexity of analysis | None | None |
| ‘on-going’ access to datasets | ‘on’going’ access to data allowed where appropriate for up to 5 years- then new application needed | n/a | NILS ONLY - Projects will be archived effective from the project end date as agreed with the researcher. Researchers can apply for an extension. |
| Exploratory analysis | to inform a final research proposal, by demonstrating how that proposal would serve the public good. No requirement to fulfil project criteria. | This would not meet requirements of ADRN project so would not be agreed by approvals panel. However, a pilot project is possible which scopes further work. | Projects without a clear hypothesis would not be approved by the NILS Research Approval Groups. |
|  | Lasts one year maximum- no outputs |  | n/a |
| Approval process | Microdata release panel | ADRN approvals panel | NISRA panel |
| Transition for existing approved researchers | Transition without reapplying or retaking SURE but need to complete transitional training (SURE refresher training) | n/a | n/a |
|  | If choose not to, have one year access until 12 July 2017 | n/a | n/a |
| Data access | In UK based secure setting | In UK based secure setting | In RSU secure setting |
| Breaches | Agree to share information with ADRN, UKDS and HMRC in case of misuse and deny status | ADRN to publish full list on website- could add these to be clear | NISRA will handle breaches in line with the DoF Breaches policy |
| Additional requirements for Commercial access | Research proposals must be approved by National Statistics Data Ethics Advisory Committee | Options for commercial access being considered. | No Commercial Access Allowed |

# Document Management

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# Version History

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